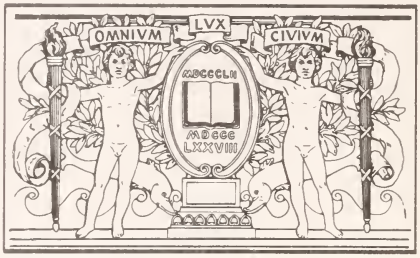

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WHEN ALFRED PRICE FELL IN LOVE WITH MISS LETTY MORRIS

An Encore

BY

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"THE AWAKENING OF HELENA RICHIE"
"DR. LAVENDER'S PEOPLE"
"OLD CHESTER TALES"
ETC. ETC.

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ACCORDING to Old Chester, to be romantic was just one shade less reprehensible than to put on airs. Captain Alfred Price, in all his seventy years, had never been guilty of putting on airs, but certainly he had something to answer for in the way of romance.

However, in the days when we children used to see him pounding up the street from the post-office, reading, as he walked, a newspaper held at arm's-length in front of him, he was far enough from romance. He was seventy years old, he weighed over

two hundred pounds, his big head was covered with a shock of grizzled red hair; his pleasures consisted in polishing his old sextant and playing on a small mouth-harmonicon. As to his vices, it was no secret that he kept a fat black bottle in the chimney-closet in his own room, and occasionally he swore strange oaths about his grandmother's nightcap. "He used to blaspheme," his daughter-in-law said; "but I said, 'Not in my presence, if you please!' So now he just says this foolish thing about a nightcap." Mrs. Drayton said that this reform would be one of the jewels in Mrs. Cyrus Price's crown; and added that she prayed that some day the Captain would give up tobacco and *rum*. "I am a poor, feeble creature," said Mrs. Drayton; "I cannot do much for my fellow-men in active mission-work,

—but I give my prayers." However, neither Mrs. Drayton's prayers nor Mrs. Cyrus's active mission-work had done more than mitigate the blasphemy; the "rum" (which was good Monongahela whiskey) was still on hand; and as for tobacco, except when sleeping, eating, playing on his harmonicon, or dozing through one of Dr. Lavendar's sermons, the Captain smoked every moment, the ashes of his pipe or cigar falling unheeded on a vast and wrinkled expanse of waistcoat.

No; he was not a romantic object. But we girls, watching him stump past the school-room window to the post-office, used to whisper to one another, "Just think! *he eloped.*"

There was romance for you!

To be sure, the elopement had not quite come off, but except for the very end, it was all as perfect as a

story. Indeed, the failure at the end made it all the better: angry parents, broken hearts—only, the worst of it was, the hearts did not stay broken! He went and married somebody else; and so did she. You would have supposed she would have died. I am sure, in her place, any one of us would have died. And yet, as Lydia Wright said, "How could a young lady die for a young gentleman with ashes all over his waistcoat?"

But when Alfred Price fell in love with Miss Letty Morris, he was not indifferent to his waistcoat, nor did he weigh two hundred pounds. He was slender and ruddy-cheeked, with tossing red-brown curls. If he swore, it was not by his grandmother nor her nightcap; if he drank, it was hard cider (which can often accomplish as much as "rum"); if he smoked it

was in secret, behind the stable. He wore a stock, and (on Sunday) a ruffled shirt; a high-waisted coat with two brass buttons behind, and very tight pantaloons. At that time he attended the Seminary for Youths in Upper Chester. Upper Chester was then, as in our time, the seat of learning in the township, the Female Academy being there, too. Both were boarding-schools, but the young people came home to spend Sunday; and their weekly returns, all together in the stage, were responsible for more than one Old Chester match. . . .

"The air," says Miss, sniffing genteelly as the coach jolts past the blossoming May orchards, "is most agreeably perfumed. And how fair is the prospect from this hill-top!"

"Fair indeed!" responds her companion, staring boldly.

Miss bridles and bites her lip.

"*I* was not observing the landscape," the young gentleman hastens to explain.

In those days (Miss Letty was born in 1804, and was eighteen when she and the ruddy Alfred sat on the back seat of the coach)—in those days the conversation of Old Chester youth was more elegant than in our time. We, who went to Miss Bailey's school, were sad degenerates in the way of manners and language; at least so our elders told us. When Lydia Wright said, "Oh my, what an awful snow-storm!" dear Miss Ellen was displeased. "Lydia," said she, "is there anything 'awe'-inspiring in this display of the elements?"

"No, 'm," faltered poor Lydia.

"Then," said Miss Bailey, gravely, "your statement that the storm is

'awful' is a falsehood. I do not suppose, my dear, that you intentionally told an untruth; it was an exaggeration. But an exaggeration, though not perhaps a falsehood, is unladylike, and should be avoided by persons of refinement." Just here the question arises: what would Miss Ellen (now in heaven) say if she could hear Lydia's Lydia, just home from college, remark— But no: Miss Ellen's precepts shall protect these pages.

But in the days when Letty Morris looked out of the coach window, and young Alfred murmured that the prospect was fair indeed, conversation was perfectly correct. And it was still decorous even when it got beyond the coach period and reached a point where Old Chester began to take notice. At first it was young Old Chester which giggled. Later old Old Chester made

some comments; it was then that Alfred's mother mentioned the matter to Alfred's father. "He is young, and, of course, foolish," Mrs. Price explained. And Mr. Price said that though folly was incidental to Alfred's years, it must be checked.

"Just check it," said Mr. Price.

Then Miss Letty's mother awoke to the situation, and said, "Fy, fy, Letitia! let me hear no more of this foolishness."

So it was that these two young persons were plunged in grief. Oh, glorious grief of thwarted love! When they met now, they did not talk of the landscape. Their conversation, though no doubt as genteel as before, was all of broken hearts. But again Letty's mother found out, and went in wrath to call on Alfred's family. It was decided between them that the

young man should be sent away from home. "To save him," says the father. "To protect my daughter," says Mrs. Morris.

But Alfred and Letty had something to say. . . . It was in December; there was a snow-storm — a storm which Lydia Wright would certainly have called "awful"; but it did not interfere with true love; these two children met in the graveyard to swear undying constancy. Alfred's lantern came twinkling through the flakes, as he threaded his way across the hill-side among the tombstones, and found Letty just inside the entrance, standing with her black serving-woman under a tulip-tree. The negress, chattering with cold and fright, kept plucking at the girl's pelisse to hurry her; but once Alfred was at her side, Letty was indifferent to storm and ghosts.

As for Alfred, he was too cast down to think of them.

"Letty, they will part us."

"No, my dear Alfred, no!"

"Yes. Yes, they will. Oh, if you were only mine!"

Miss Letty sighed.

"Will you be true to me, Letty? I am to go on a sailing-vessel to China, to be gone two years. Will you wait for me?"

Letty gave a little cry; two years! Her black woman twitched her sleeve.

"Miss Let, it's gittin' cole, honey."

"(Don't, Flora.)—Alfred, *two years!* Oh, Alfred, that is an eternity. Why, I should be—I should be twenty!"

The lantern, set on a tombstone beside them, blinked in a snowy gust. Alfred covered his face with his hands—he was shaken to his soul; the little, gay creature beside him

thrilled at a sound from behind those hands.

"Alfred,"—she said, faintly; then she hid her face against his arm; "my dear Alfred, I will, if you desire it—fly with you!"

Alfred, with a gasp, lifted his head and stared at her. His slower mind had seen nothing but separation and despair; but the moment the word was said he was aflame. What! Would she? Could she? Adorable creature!

"Miss Let, my feet done git cole—"

"(Flora, be still!)—Yes, Alfred, yes. I am thine."

The boy caught her in his arms. "But I am to be sent away on Monday! My angel, could you—fly, tomorrow?"

And Letty, her face still hidden against his shoulder, nodded.

Then, while the shivering Flora

stamped, and beat her arms, and the lantern flared and sizzled, Alfred made their plans, which were simple to the point of childishness. "My own!" he said, when it was all arranged; then he held the lantern up and looked into her face, blushing and determined, with snowflakes gleaming on the curls that pushed out from under her big hood. "You will meet me at the minister's?" he said, passionately. "You will not fail me?"

"I will not fail you!" she said; and laughed joyously; but the young man's face was white.

She kept her word; and with the assistance of Flora, romantic again when her feet were warm, all went as they planned. Clothes were packed, savings-banks opened, and a chaise abstracted from the Price stable.

"It is my intention," said the youth,

"to return to my father the value of the vehicle and nag, as soon as I can secure a position which will enable me to support my Letty in comfort and fashion."

On the night of the elopement the two children met at the minister's house. (Yes, the very old Rectory to which we Old Chester children went every Saturday afternoon to Dr. Lavendar's Collect class. But of course there was no Dr. Lavendar there in those days).

Well; Alfred requested this minister to pronounce them man and wife; but he coughed and poked the fire. "I am of age," Alfred insisted; "I am twenty-two." Then Mr. Smith said he must first go and put on his bands and surplice; and Alfred said, "If you please, sir." And off went Mr. Smith —*and sent a note to Alfred's father and Letty's mother!*

An Encore

We girls used to wonder what the lovers talked about while they waited for the return of the surpliced traitor. Ellen Dale always said they were foolish to wait. "Why didn't they go right off?" said Ellen. "If *I* were going to elope, I shouldn't bother to get married. But, oh, think of how they felt when in walked those cruel parents!"

The story was that they were torn weeping from each other's arms; that Letty was sent to bed for two days on bread and water; that Alfred was packed off to Philadelphia the very next morning, and sailed in less than a week. They did not see each other again.

But the end of the story was not romantic at all. Letty, although she crept about for a while in deep disgrace, and brooded upon death—that

interesting impossibility, so dear to youth—*married*, if you please! when she was twenty, somebody called North,—and went away to live. When Alfred came back, seven years later, he got married, too. He married a Miss Barkley. He used to go away on long voyages, so perhaps he wasn't really fond of her. We tried to think so, for we liked Captain Price.

In our day Captain Price was a widower. He had given up the sea, and settled down to live in Old Chester; his son, Cyrus, lived with him, and his languid daughter-in-law—a young lady of dominant feebleness, who ruled the two men with that most powerful domestic rod, foolish weakness. This combination in a woman will cause a mountain (a masculine mountain) to fly from its firm base; while kindness, justice, and good sense leave it upon un-

shaken foundations of selfishness. Mrs. Cyrus was a Goliath of silliness; when billowing black clouds heaped themselves in the west on a hot afternoon, she turned pale with apprehension, and the Captain and Cyrus ran for four tumblers, into which they put the legs of her bed, where, cowering among the feathers, she lay cold with fear and perspiration. Every night the Captain screwed down all the windows on the lower floor; in the morning Cyrus pulled the screws out. Cyrus had a pretty taste in horseflesh, but Gussie cried so when he once bought a trotter that he had long ago resigned himself to a friendly beast of twenty-seven years, who could not go much out of a walk because he had string-halt in both hind legs.

But one must not be too hard on Mrs. Cyrus. In the first place, she was

not born in Old Chester. But, added to that, just think of her name! The effect of names upon character is not considered as it should be. If one is called Gussie for thirty years, it is almost impossible not to become gussie after a while. Mrs. Cyrus could not be Augusta; few women can; but it was easy to be gussie—irresponsible, silly, selfish. She had a vague, flat laugh, she ate a great deal of candy, and she was afraid of— But one cannot catalogue Mrs. Cyrus's fears. They were as the sands of the sea for number. And these two men were governed by them. Only when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed will it be understood why a man loves a fool; but why he obeys her is obvious enough: Fear is the greatest power in the world; Gussie was afraid of thunder-storms, or what not; but the Captain and Cyrus

were afraid of Gussie! A hint of tears in her pale eyes, and her husband would sigh with anxiety and Captain Price slip his pipe into his pocket and sneak out of the room. Doubtless Cyrus would often have been glad to follow him, but the old gentleman glared when his son showed a desire for his company.

"Want to come and smoke with me? 'Your granny was Murray!'—you're sojering. You're first mate; you belong on the bridge in storms. I'm before the mast. Tend to your business!"

It was forty-eight years before Letty and Alfred saw each other again—or at least before persons calling themselves by those old names saw each other. Were they Letty and Alfred—this tousled, tangled, good-humored old man, ruddy and cowed, and this

THE CAPTAIN AND CYRUS WERE AFRAID OF GUSSIE

small, bright-eyed old lady, Mrs. North, led about by a devoted daughter? Certainly these two persons bore no resemblance to the boy and girl torn from each other's arms that cold December night. Alfred had been mild and slow; Captain Price (except when his daughter-in-law raised her finger) was a pleasant old roaring lion. Letty had been a gay, high-spirited little creature, not as retiring, perhaps, as a young female should be, and certainly self-willed; Mrs. North was completely under the thumb of her daughter Mary. Not that "under the thumb" means unhappiness; Mary North desired only her mother's welfare, and lived fiercely for that single purpose. From morning until night (and, indeed, until morning again, for she rose often from her bed to see that there was no draught from the crack

of the open window), all through the twenty-four hours she was on duty.

When this excellent daughter appeared in Old Chester and said she was going to hire a house, and bring her mother back to end her days in the home of her girlhood, Old Chester displayed a friendly interest; when she decided upon a house on Main Street, directly opposite Captain Price's, it began to recall the romance of that thwarted elopement.

"Do you suppose she knows that story about old Alfred Price and her mother?" said Old Chester; and it looked sidewise at Miss North with polite curiosity. This was not altogether because of her mother's romantic past, but because of her own manners and clothes. With painful exactness, Miss North endeavored to follow the fashion; but she looked as

if articles of clothing had been thrown at her and some had stuck. As to her manners, Old Chester was divided; Mrs. David Baily said, with delicate disgust, that they were bad; but Mrs. Barkley said, that the trouble was she hadn't any manners; and as for Dr. Lavendar, he insisted that she was just shy. But, as Mrs. Drayton said, that was like Dr. Lavendar, always making excuses for wrong-doing! "Which," said Mrs. Drayton, "is a strange thing for a minister to do. For my part, I cannot understand impoliteness in a *Christian* female. But we must not judge," Mrs. Drayton ended, with what Willy King called her "holy look." Without wishing to "judge," it may be said that, in the matter of manners, Miss Mary North, palpitatingly anxious to be polite, told the truth; and as everybody knows, truthfulness and

agreeable manners are often divorced on the ground of incompatibility. Miss North said things that other people only thought. When Mrs. Willy King remarked that, though she did not pretend to be a good house-keeper, she had the backs of her pictures dusted every other day, Miss North, her chin trembling with shyness, said, with a panting smile:

"That's not good house-keeping; it's foolish waste of time." And when Neddy Dilworth's wife confessed coquettishly, that one would hardly take her to be a year or two older than her husband, would one? Mary North exclaimed, in utter astonishment: "is that all? Why, you look twelve years older!" Of course such truthfulness was far from genteel, — though Old Chester was not as displeased as you might have supposed.

An Encore

While Miss North, timorous and sincere (and determined to be polite), was putting the house in order before sending for her mother, Old Chester invited her to tea, and asked her many questions about Letty and the late Mr. North. But nobody asked whether she knew that her opposite neighbor, Captain Price, might have been her father — at least that was the way Miss Ellen's girls expressed it. Captain Price himself did not enlighten the daughter he did not have; but he went rolling across the street, and pulling off his big shabby felt hat, stood at the foot of the steps, and roared out: "Morning! Anything I can do for you?" Miss North, indoors, hanging window-curtains, her mouth full of tacks, shook her head. Then she removed the tacks and came to the front door.

An Encore

"Do you smoke, sir?"

Captain Price removed his pipe from his mouth and looked at it. "Why! I believe I do, sometimes," he said.

"I inquired," said Miss North, smiling tremulously, her hands gripped hard together, "because, if you do, I will ask you to desist when passing our windows."

Captain Price was so dumfounded that for a moment words failed him. Then he said, meekly, "Does your mother object to tobacco smoke, ma'am?"

"It is injurious to all ladies' throats," Miss North explained, her voice quivering and determined.

"Does your mother resemble you, madam?" said Captain Price, slowly.

"Oh no! my mother is pretty. She has my eyes, but that's all."

"I didn't mean in looks," said the

old man; "she did not look in the least like you; not in the least! I mean in her views?"

"Her views? I don't think my mother has any particular views," Miss North answered, hesitatingly; "I spare her all thought," she ended, and her thin face bloomed suddenly with love.

Old Chester rocked with the Captain's report of his call; and Mrs. Cyrus told her husband that she only wished this lady would stop his father's smoking.

"Just look at his ashes," said Gussie; "I put saucers round everywhere to catch 'em, but he shakes 'em off anywhere—right on the carpet! And if you say anything, he just says, 'Oh, they'll keep the moths away!' I worry so for fear he'll set the house on fire."

An Encore

Mrs. Cyrus was so moved by Miss North's active mission-work that the very next day she wandered across the street to call. "I hope I'm not interrupting you," she began, "but I thought I'd just—"

"Yes; you are," said Miss North; "but never mind; stay, if you want to." She tried to smile, but she looked at the duster which she had put down upon Mrs. Cyrus's entrance.

Gussie wavered as to whether to take offence, but decided not to — at least not until she could make the remark which was buzzing in her small mind. It seemed strange, she said, that Mrs. North should come, not only to Old Chester, but right across the street from Captain Price!

"Why?" said Mary North, briefly.

"*Why?*" said Mrs. Cyrus, with faint

animation. "Gracious! is it possible that you don't know about your mother and my father-in-law?"

"Your father-in-law?—my mother?"

"Why, you know," said Mrs. Cyrus, with her light cackle, "your mother was a little romantic when she was young. No doubt she has conquered it by this time. But she tried to elope with my father-in-law."

"What!"

"Oh, bygones should be bygones," Mrs. Cyrus said, soothingly; "forgive and forget, you know. I have no doubt she is perfectly—well, perfectly correct, now. If there's anything I can do to assist you, ma'am, I'll send my husband over"; and then she lounged away, leaving poor Mary North silent with indignation. But that night at tea Gussie said that she thought strong-minded ladies were

very unladylike; "they say she's strong-minded," she added, languidly.

"Lady!" said the Captain. "She's a man-o'-war's-man in petticoats."

Gussie giggled.

"She's as flat as a lath," the Captain declared; "if it hadn't been for her face, I wouldn't have known whether she was coming bow or stern on."

"I think," said Mrs. Cyrus, "that that woman has some motive in bringing her mother back here; and *right across the street*, too!"

"What motive?" said Cyrus, mildly curious.

But Augusta waited for conjugal privacy to explain herself: "Cyrus, I worry so, because I'm sure that woman thinks she can catch your father again. Oh, just listen to that harmonicon down-stairs! It sets my teeth on edge!"

Then Cyrus, the silent, servile first mate, broke out: "Gussie, you're a fool!"

And Augusta cried all night, and showed herself at the breakfast-table lantern-jawed and sunken-eyed; and her father-in-law judged it wise to sprinkle his cigar ashes behind the stable.

The day that Mrs. North arrived in Old Chester, Mrs. Cyrus commanded the situation; she saw the daughter get out of the stage, and hurry into the house for a chair so that the mother might descend more easily. She also saw a little, white-haired old lady take that opportunity to leap nimbly, and quite unaided, from the swinging step.

"Now, mother!" expostulated Mary North, chair in hand, and breathless,

"you might have broken your limb! Here, take my arm."

Meekly, after her moment of freedom, the little lady put her hand on that gaunt arm, and tripped up the path and into the house, where, alas! Augusta Price lost sight of them. Yet even she, with all her disapproval of strong-minded ladies, must have admired the tenderness of the man-o'-war's-man. Miss North put her mother into a big chair, and hurried to bring a dish of curds.

"I'm not hungry," protested Mrs. North.

"Never mind. It will do you good."

With a sigh the little old lady ate the curds, looking about her with curious eyes. "Why, we're right across the street from the old Price house!" she said.

"Did you know them, mother?" demanded Miss North.

"Dear me, yes," said Mrs. North, twinkling; "why, I'd forgotten all about it, but the eldest boy— Now, what was his name? Al—something. Alfred—Albert; no, Alfred. He was a beau of mine."

"Mother! I don't think it's refined to use such a word."

"Well, he wanted me to elope with him," Mrs. North said, gayly; "if that isn't being a beau, I don't know what is. I haven't thought of it for years."

"If you've finished your curds you must lie down," said Miss North.

"Oh, I'll just look about—"

"No; you are tired. You must lie down."

"Who is that stout old gentleman going into the Price house?" Mrs. North said, lingering at the window.

"Oh, that's your Alfred Price," her daughter answered; and added, that she hoped her mother would be pleased with the house. "We have boarded so long, I think you'll enjoy a home of your own."

"Indeed I shall!" cried Mrs. North, her eyes snapping with delight. "Mary, I'll wash the breakfast dishes, as my mother used to do!"

"Oh no," Mary North protested; "it would tire you. I mean to take every care from your mind."

"But," Mrs. North pleaded, "you have so much to do; and—"

"Never mind about me," said the daughter, earnestly; "you are my first consideration."

"I know it, my dear," said Mrs. North, meekly. And when Old Chester came to make its call, one of the first things she said was that her Mary

was such a good daughter. Miss North, her anxious face red with determination, bore out the assertion by constantly interrupting the conversation to bring a footstool, or shut a window, or put a shawl over her mother's knees. "My mother's limb troubles her," she explained to visitors (in point of modesty, Mary North did not leave her mother a leg to stand on); then she added, breathlessly, with her tremulous smile, that she wished they would please not talk too much. "Conversation tires her," she explained. At which the little, pretty old lady opened and closed her hands, and protested that she was not tired at all. But the callers departed. As the door closed behind them, Mrs. North was ready to cry.

"Now, Mary, really!" she began.

"Mother, I don't care! I don't like

to say a thing like that, though I'm sure I always try to speak politely. But it's the truth, and to save you I would tell the truth no matter how painful it was to do so."

"But I enjoy seeing people, and—"

"It is bad for you to be tired," Mary said, her thin face quivering still with the effort she had made; "and they sha'n't tire you while I am here to protect you." And her protection never flagged. When Captain Price called, she asked him to please converse in a low tone, as noise was bad for her mother. "He had been here a good while before I came in," she defended herself to Mrs. North, afterwards; "and I'm sure I spoke politely."

The fact was, the day the Captain came, Miss North was out. Her mother had seen him pounding up the

street, and hurrying to the door, called out, gayly, in her little, old, piping voice, "Alfred—Alfred Price!"

The Captain turned and looked at her. There was just one moment's pause; perhaps he tried to bridge the years, and to believe that it was Letty who spoke to him—Letty, whom he had last seen that wintry night, pale and weeping, in the slender green sheath of a fur-trimmed pelisse. If so, he gave it up; this plump, white-haired, bright-eyed old lady, in a wide-spreading, rustling black silk dress, was not Letty. She was Mrs. North.

The Captain came across the street, waving his newspaper, and saying, "So you've cast anchor in the old port, ma'am?"

"My daughter is not at home; do come in," she said, smiling and nodding. Captain Price hesitated; then

he put his pipe in his pocket and followed her into the parlor. "Sit down," she cried, gayly. "Well, *Alfred!*"

"Well—*Mrs. North!*" he said; and then they both laughed, and she began to ask questions: Who was dead? Who had so and so married? "There are not many of us left," she said. "The two Ferris girls and Theophilus Morrison and Johnny Gordon—he came to see me yesterday. And Matty Dilworth; she was younger than I—oh, by ten years. She married the oldest Barkley boy, didn't she? I hear he didn't turn out well. You married his sister, didn't you? Was it the oldest girl or the second sister?"

"It was the second—Jane. Yes, poor Jane. I lost her in 'forty-five."

"You have children?" she said, sympathetically.

"I've got a boy," he said; "but he's married."

"My girl has never married; she's a good daughter,"—Mrs. North broke off with a nervous laugh; "here she is, now!"

Mary North, who had suddenly appeared in the doorway, gave a questioning sniff, and the Captain's hand sought his guilty pocket; but Miss North only said: "How do you do, sir? Now, mother, don't talk too much and get tired." She stopped and tried to smile, but the painful color came into her face. "And—if you please, Captain Price, will you speak in a low tone? Large, noisy persons exhaust the oxygen in the air, and—"

"*Mary!*" cried poor Mrs. North; but the Captain, clutching his old felt hat, began to hoist himself up from the sofa, scattering ashes about as he

did so. Mary North compressed her lips.

"I tell my daughter-in-law they'll keep the moths away," the old gentleman said, sheepishly.

"I use camphor," said Miss North, "Flora must bring a dust-pan."

"Flora?" Alfred Price said. "Now, what's my association with that name?"

"She was our old cook," Mrs. North explained; "this Flora is her daughter. But you never saw old Flora?"

"Why, yes, I did," the old man said, slowly. "Yes. I remember Flora. Well, good-bye,—Mrs. North."

"Good-bye, Alfred. Come again," she said, cheerfully.

"Mother, here's your beef tea," said a brief voice.

Alfred Price fled. He met his son just as he was entering his own house,

and burst into a confidence: "Cy, my boy, come aft and splice the main-brace. Cyrus, what a female! She knocked me higher than Gilroy's kite. And her mother was as sweet a girl as you ever saw!" He drew his son into a little, low-browed, dingy room at the end of the hall. Its grimy untidiness matched the old Captain's clothes, but it was his one spot of refuge in his own house; here he could scatter his tobacco ashes almost unrebuked, and play on his harmonicon without seeing Gussie wince and draw in her breath; for Mrs. Cyrus rarely entered the "cabin." "I worry so about its disorderliness that I won't go in," she used to say, in a resigned way. And the Captain accepted her decision with resignation of his own. "Crafts of your bottom can't navigate in these waters," he agreed, earnestly; and,

indeed, the room was so cluttered with his belongings that voluminous hoop-skirts could not get steerageway. "He has so much rubbish," Gussie complained; but it was precious rubbish to the old man. His chest was behind the door; a blow-fish, stuffed and varnished, hung from the ceiling; two colored prints of the "Barque *Letty M.*, 800 tons," decorated the walls; his sextant, polished daily by his big, clumsy hands, hung over the mantelpiece, on which were many dusty treasures—the mahogany spoke of an old steering-wheel; a whale's tooth; two Chinese wrestlers, in ivory; a fan of spreading white coral; a conch-shell, its beautiful red lip serving to hold a loose bunch of cigars. In the chimney-breast was a little door, and the Captain, pulling his son into the room after that call upon Mrs. North,

fumbled in his pocket for the key. "Here," he said; "(as the Governor of North Carolina said to the Governor of South Carolina)—Cyrus, she handed round *beef tea!*"

But Cyrus was to receive still further enlightenment on the subject of his opposite neighbor:

"She called him in. I heard her, with my own ears! 'Alfred,' she said, 'come in.' Cyrus, she has designs; oh, I worry so about it! He ought to be protected. He is very old, and, of course, foolish. You ought to check it at once."

"Gussie, I don't like you to talk that way about my father," Cyrus began.

"You'll like it less later on. He'll go and see her to-morrow."

"Why shouldn't he go and see her to-morrow?" Cyrus said, and added a modest bad word; which made Gussie

cry. And yet, in spite of what his wife called his "blasphemy," Cyrus began to be vaguely uncomfortable whenever he saw his father put his pipe in his pocket and go across the street. And as the winter brightened into spring, the Captain went quite often. So, for that matter, did other old friends of Mrs. North's generation, who by-and-by began to smile at one another, and say, "Well, Alfred and Letty are great friends!" For, because Captain Price lived right across the street, he went most of all. At least, that was what Miss North said to herself with obvious common-sense — until Mrs. Cyrus put her on the right track. . . .

"What!" gasped Mary North. "But it's impossible!"

"It would be very unbecoming, considering their years," said Gussie; "but I worry so, because, you know, nothing

is impossible when people are foolish; and of course, at their age, they are apt to be foolish."

So the seed was dropped. Certainly he did come very often. Certainly her mother seemed very glad to see him. Certainly they had very long talks. Mary North shivered with apprehension. But it was not until a week later that this miserable suspicion grew strong enough to find words. It was after tea, and the two ladies were sitting before a little fire. Mary North had wrapped a shawl about her mother, and given her a footstool, and pushed her chair nearer the fire, and then pulled it away, and opened and shut the parlor door three times to regulate the draught. Then she sat down in the corner of the sofa, exhausted but alert.

"If there's anything you want, mother, you'll be sure and tell me?"

"Yes, my dear."

"I think I'd better put another shawl over your limbs?"

"Oh no, indeed!"

"Mother, are you *sure* you don't feel a draught?"

"No, Mary; and it wouldn't hurt me if I did!"

"I was only trying to make you comfortable—"

"I know that, my dear; you are a very good daughter. Mary, I think it would be nice if I made a cake. So many people call, and—"

"I'll make it to-morrow."

"Oh, I'll make it myself," Mrs. North protested, eagerly; "I'd really enjoy—"

"Mother! Tire yourself out in the kitchen? No, indeed! Flora and I will see to it."

Mrs. North sighed.

Her daughter sighed too; then suddenly burst out: "Old Captain Price comes here pretty often."

Mrs. North nodded pleasantly. "That daughter-in-law doesn't half take care of him. His clothes are dreadfully shabby. There was a button off his coat to-day. And she's a foolish creature."

"Foolish? she's an unladylike person!" cried Miss North, with so much feeling that her mother looked at her in mild astonishment. "And coarse, too," said Mary North; "I think married ladies are apt to be coarse. From association with men, I suppose."

"What has she done?" demanded Mrs. North, much interested.

"She hinted that he—that you—"

"Well?"

"That he came here to — to see you."

"Well, who else would he come to see? Not you!" said her mother.

"She hinted that he might want to—to marry you."

"Well — upon my word! I knew she was a ridiculous creature, but really—!"

Mary's face softened with relief. "Of course she is foolish; but—"

"Poor Alfred! What has he ever done to have such a daughter-in-law? Mary, the Lord gives us our children; but *Somebody Else* gives us our in-laws!"

"Mother!" said Mary North, horrified, "you do say such things! But really he oughtn't to come so often. People will begin to notice it; and then they'll talk. I'll—I'll take you away from Old Chester rather than have him bother you."

"Mary, you are just as foolish as

his daughter-in-law," said Mrs. North, impatiently.

And, somehow, poor Mary North's heart sank.

Nor was she the only perturbed person in town that night. Mrs. Cyrus had a headache, so it was necessary for Cyrus to hold her hand and assure her that Willy King said a headache did not mean brain-fever.

"Willy King doesn't know everything. If he had headaches like mine, he wouldn't be so sure. I am always worrying about things, and I believe my brain can't stand it. And now I've got your father to worry about!"

"Better try and sleep, Gussie. I'll put some Kaliston on your head."

"Kaliston! Kaliston won't keep me from worrying. Oh, listen to that harmonicon!"

"Gussie, I'm sure he isn't thinking of Mrs. North."

"Mrs. North is thinking of him, which is a great deal more dangerous. Cyrus, you *must* ask Dr. Lavendar to interfere."

As this was at least the twentieth assault upon poor Cyrus's common-sense, the citadel trembled.

"Do you wish me to go into brain-fever before your eyes, just from worry?" Gussie demanded. "You *must* go!"

"Well, maybe, perhaps, to-morrow—"

"To-night—to-night," said Augusta, faintly.

And Cyrus surrendered.

"Look under the bed before you go," Gussie murmured.

Cyrus looked. "Nobody there," he said, reassuringly; and went on tiptoe

out of the darkened, cologne-scented room. But as he passed along the hall, and saw his father in his little cabin of a room, smoking placidly, and polishing his sextant with loving hands, Cyrus's heart reproached him.

"How's her head, Cy?" the Captain called out.

"Oh, better, I guess," Cyrus said. ("I'll be hanged if I speak to Dr. Lavendar!")

"That's good," said the Captain, beginning to hoist himself up out of his chair. "Going out? Hold hard, and I'll go 'long. I want to call on Mrs. North."

Cyrus stiffened. "Cold night, sir," he remonstrated.

"'Your granny was Murray, and wore a black nightcap!'" said the Captain; "you are getting delicate in your old age, Cy." He got up, and plunged

into his coat, and tramped out, slamming the door heartily behind him—for which, later, poor Cyrus got the credit. "Where you bound?"

"Oh — down - street," said Cyrus, vaguely.

"Sealed orders?" said the Captain, with never a bit of curiosity in his big, kind voice; and Cyrus felt as small as he was. But when he left the old man at Mrs. North's door, he was uneasy again. Maybe Gussie was right! Women are keener about those things than men. And his uneasiness actually carried him to Dr. Lavendar's study, where he tried to appear at ease by patting Danny.

"What's the matter with you, Cyrus?" said Dr. Lavendar, looking at him over his spectacles. (Dr. Lavendar, in his wicked old heart, always wanted to call this young man Cipher;

but, so far, grace had been given him to withstand temptation.) "What's wrong?" he said.

And Cyrus, somehow, told his troubles.

At first Dr. Lavendar chuckled; then he frowned. "Gussie put you up to this, Cy—*rus?*" he said.

"Well, my wife's a woman," Cyrus began, "and they're keener on such matters than men; and she said, perhaps you would—would—"

"*What?*" Dr. Lavendar rapped on the table with the bowl of his pipe, so loudly that Danny opened one eye. "Would what?"

"Well," Cyrus stammered, "you know, Dr. Lavendar, as Gussie says, 'there's no fo—'"

"You needn't finish it," Dr. Lavendar interrupted, dryly; "I've heard it before. Gussie didn't say anything

about a young fool, did she?" Then he eyed Cyrus. "Or a middle-aged one? I've seen middle-aged fools that could beat us old fellows hollow."

"Oh, but Mrs. North is far beyond middle age," said Cyrus, earnestly.

Dr. Lavendar shook his head. "Well, well!" he said. "To think that Alfred Price should have such a— And yet he is as sensible a man as I know!"

"Until now," Cyrus amended. "But Gussie thought you'd better caution him. We don't want him, at his time of life, to make a mistake."

"It's much more to the point that I should caution you not to make a mistake," said Dr. Lavendar; and then he rapped on the table again, sharply. "The Captain has no such idea—unless Gussie has given it to him. Cyrus, my advice to you is to go home and tell your wife not to be

a goose. I'll tell her, if you want me to?"

"Oh no, no!" said Cyrus, very much frightened. "I'm afraid you'd hurt her feelings."

"I'm afraid I should," said Dr. Lavendar, grimly.

"She's so sensitive," Cyrus tried to excuse her; "you can't think how sensitive she is, and timid. I never knew anybody so timid! Why, she makes me look under the bed every night, for fear there's somebody there!"

"Well, next time, tell her 'two men and a dog'; that will take her mind off your father." It must be confessed that Dr. Lavendar was out of temper —a sad fault in one of his age, as Mrs. Drayton often said; but his irritability was so marked that Cyrus finally slunk off, uncomforted, and afraid to meet Gussie's eye, even under its

bandage of a cologne-scented handkerchief.

However, he had to meet it, and he tried to make the best of his own humiliation by saying that Dr. Lavendar was shocked at the idea of the Captain being interested in Mrs. North. "He said father had been, until now, as sensible a man as he knew, and he didn't believe he would think of such a dreadful thing. And neither do I, Gussie, honestly," Cyrus said.

"But Mrs. North isn't sensible," Gussie protested, "and she'll—"

"Dr. Lavendar said 'there was no fool like a middle-aged fool,'" Cyrus agreed.

"Middle-aged! She's as old as Methuselah!"

"That's what I told him," said Cyrus.

By the end of April Old Chester smiled. How could it help it? Gus-

sie worried so that she took frequent occasion to point out possibilities; and after the first gasp of incredulity, one could hear a faint echo of the giggles of forty-eight years before. Mary North heard it, and her heart burned within her.

"It's got to stop," she said to herself, passionately; "I must speak to his son."

But her throat was dry at the thought. It seemed as if it would kill her to speak to a man on such a subject, even to as little of a man as Cyrus. But, poor, shy tigress! to save her mother, what would she not do? In her pain and fright she said to Mrs. North that if that old man kept on making her uncomfortable and conspicuous, they would leave Old Chester!

Mrs. North twinkled with amuse-

ment when Mary, in her strained and quivering voice, began, but her jaw dropped at those last words; Mary was capable of carrying her off at a day's notice! The little old lady trembled with distressed reassurances — but Captain Price continued to call.

And that was how it came about that this devoted daughter, after days of exasperation and nights of anxiety, reached a point of tense determination. She would go and see the man's son, and say . . . That afternoon, as she stood before the swinging glass on her high bureau, tying her bonnet-strings, she tried to think what she would say. She hoped God would give her words — polite words; "for I *must* be polite," she reminded herself desperately. When she started across the street her paisley shawl had slipped from

one shoulder, so that the point dragged on the flagstones; she had split her right glove up the back, and her bonnet was jolted over sidewise; but the thick Chantilly veil hid the quiver of her chin.

Gussie met her with effusion, and Mary, striving to be polite, smiled painfully, and said:

"I don't want to see you; I want to see your husband."

Gussie tossed her head; but she made haste to call Cyrus, who came shambling along the hall from the cabin. The parlor was dark, for though it was a day of sunshine and merry May wind, Gussie kept the shutters bowed—but Cyrus could see the pale intensity of his visitor's face. There was a moment's silence, broken by a distant harmonicon.

"Mr. Price," said Mary North, with

pale, courageous lips, "you must stop your father."

Cyrus opened his weak mouth to ask an explanation, but Gussie rushed in.

"You are quite right, ma'am. Cyrus worries so about it (of course we know what you refer to). And Cyrus says it ought to be checked immediately, to save the old gentleman!"

"You must stop him," said Mary North, "for my mother's sake."

"Well—" Cyrus began.

"Have you cautioned your mother?" Gussie demanded.

"Yes," Miss North said, briefly. To talk to this woman of her mother made her wince, but it had to be done. "Will you speak to your father, Mr. Price?"

"Well, I—"

"Of course he will!" Gussie broke in; "Cyrus, he is in the cabin now."

"Well, to-morrow I—" Cyrus got up and sidled towards the door. "Anyhow, I don't believe he's thinking of such a thing."

"Miss North," said Gussie, rising, "*I* will do it."

"What, *now?*" faltered Mary North.

"Now," said Mrs. Cyrus, firmly.

"Oh," said Miss North, "I—I think I will go home. Gentlemen, when they are crossed, speak so—so earnestly."

Gussie nodded. The joy of action and of combat entered suddenly into her little soul; she never looked less vulgar than at that moment. Cyrus had disappeared.

Mary North, white and trembling, hurried out. A wheezing strain from the harmonicon followed her into the May sunshine, then ended, abruptly—Mrs. Price had begun! On her own door-step Miss North stopped and lis-

tened, holding her breath for an outburst. . . . It came: a roar of laughter. Then silence. Mary North stood, motionless, in her own parlor; her shawl, hanging from one elbow, trailed behind her; her other glove had split; her bonnet was blown back and over one ear; her heart was pounding in her throat. She was perfectly aware that she had done an unheard-of thing. "But," she said, aloud, "I'd do it again. I'd do anything to protect her. But I hope I was polite?" Then she thought how courageous Mrs. Cyrus was. "She's as brave as a lion!" said Mary North. Yet, had Miss North been able to stand at the Captain's door, she would have witnessed cowardice. . . .

"Gussie, I wouldn't cry. Confound that female, coming over and stirring you up! Now don't, Gussie! Why, I

never thought of— Gussie, I wouldn't cry—"

"I have worried almost to death. Pro-promise!"

"Oh, your granny was Mur— Gussie, my dear, now *don't.*"

"Dr. Lavendar said you'd always been so sensible; he said he didn't see how you could think of such a dreadful thing."

"What! Lavendar? I'll thank Lavendar to mind his business!" Captain Price forgot Gussie; he spoke "earnestly." "Dog-gone these people that pry into— Oh, now, Gussie, *don't!*"

"I've worried so awfully," said Mrs. Cyrus. "Everybody is talking about you. And Dr. Lavendar is so — so angry about it; and now the daughter has charged on me as though it is my fault! Of course, she is queer, but—"

"Queer? she's queer as Dick's hat-band! Why do you listen to her? Gussie, such an idea never entered my head—or Mrs. North's either."

"Oh yes, it has! Her daughter said that she had had to speak to her—"

Captain Price, dumfounded, forgot his fear and burst out: "You're a pack of fools, the whole caboodle! I swear I—"

"Oh, don't blaspheme!" said Gussie, faintly, and staggered a little, so that all the Captain's terror returned. *If she fainted!*

"Hi, there, Cyrus! Come aft, will you? Gussie's getting white around the gills—Cyrus!"

Cyrus came, running, and between them they got the swooning Gussie to her room. Afterwards, when Cyrus tiptoed down-stairs, he found the Cap-

tain at the cabin door. The old man beckoned mysteriously.

"Cy, my boy, come in here"—he hunted about in his pocket for the key of the cupboard—"Cyrus, I'll tell you what happened; that female across the street came in, and told poor Gussie some cock-and-bull story about her mother and me!" The Captain chuckled, and picked up his harmonicon. "It scared the life out of Gussie," he said; then, with sudden angry gravity, —"these people that poke their noses into other's people's business ought to be thrashed. Well, I'm going over to see Mrs. North." And off he stumped, leaving Cyrus staring after him, open-mouthed.

If Mary North had been at home, she would have met him with all the agonized courage of shyness and a

good conscience. But she had fled out of the house, and down along the River Road, to be alone and regain her self-control.

The Captain, however, was not seeking Miss North. He opened the front door, and advancing to the foot of the stairs, called up: "Ahoy, there! Mrs. North!"

Mrs. North came trotting out to answer the summons. "Why, Alfred!" she exclaimed, looking over the banisters, "when did you come in? I didn't hear the bell ring. I'll come right down."

"It didn't ring; I walked in," said the Captain. And Mrs. North came down-stairs, perhaps a little stiffly, but as pretty an old lady as you ever saw. Her white curls lay against faintly pink cheeks, and her lace cap had a pink bow on it. But she looked anxious and uncomfortable.

("Oh," she was saying to herself, "I do hope Mary's out!)—Well, Alfred?" she said; but her voice was frightened.

The Captain stumped along in front of her into the parlor, and motioned her to a seat. "Mrs. North," he said, his face red, his eye hard, "some jackdonkeys have been poking their noses (of course they're females) into our affairs; and—"

"Oh, Alfred, isn't it horrid in them?" said the old lady.

"Darn 'em!" said the Captain.

"It makes me mad!" cried Mrs. North; then her spirit wavered. "Mary is so foolish; she says she'll—she'll take me away from Old Chester. I laughed at first, it was so foolish. But when she said that—oh *dear!*"

"Well, but, my dear madam, say you won't go. Ain't you skipper?"

"No, I'm not," she said, dolefully. "Mary brought me here, and she'll take me away, if she thinks it best. Best for *me*, you know. Mary is a good daughter, Alfred. I don't want you to think she isn't. But she's foolish. Unmarried women are apt to be foolish."

The Captain thought of Gussie, and sighed. "Well," he said, with the simple candor of the sea, "I guess there ain't much difference in 'em, married or unmarried."

"It's the interference makes me mad," Mrs. North declared, hotly.

"Damn the whole crew!" said the Captain; and the old lady laughed delightedly.

"Thank you, Alfred!"

"My daughter-in-law is crying her eyes out," the Captain sighed.

"Tck!" said Mrs. North; "Alfred,

you have no sense. Let her cry. It's good for her!"

"Oh no," said the Captain, shocked.

"You're a perfect slave to her," cried Mrs. North.

"No more than you are to your daughter," Captain Price defended himself; and Mrs. North sighed.

"We are just real foolish, Alfred, to listen to 'em. As if we didn't know what was good for us."

"People have interfered with us a good deal, first and last," the Captain said, grimly.

The faint color in Mrs. North's cheeks suddenly deepened. "So they have," she said.

The Captain shook his head in a discouraged way; he took his pipe out of his pocket and looked at it absent-mindedly. "I suppose I can stay at home, and let 'em get over it?"

"Stay at home? Why, you'd far better—"

"What?" said the Captain.

"Come oftener!" cried the old lady. "Let 'em get over it by getting used to it."

Captain Price looked doubtful. "But how about your daughter?"

Mrs. North quailed. "I forgot Mary," she admitted.

"I don't bother you, coming to see you, do I?" the Captain said, anxiously.

"Why, Alfred, I love to see you. If our children would just let us alone!"

"First it was our parents," said Captain Price. He frowned heavily. "According to other people, first we were too young to have sense; and now we're too old." He took out his worn old pouch, plugged some shag into his pipe, and struck a match

under the mantel-piece. He sighed, with deep discouragement.

Mrs. North sighed too. Neither of them spoke for a moment; then the little old lady drew a quick breath and flashed a look at him; opened her lips; closed them with a snap; then regarded the toe of her slipper fixedly. The color flooded up to her soft white hair.

The Captain, staring hopelessly, suddenly blinked; then his honest red face slowly broadened into beaming astonishment and satisfaction. "*Mrs. North*—"

"Captain Price!" she parried, breathlessly.

"So long as our affectionate children have suggested it!"

"Suggested—what?"

"Let's give 'em something to cry about!"

"Alfred!"

"Look here: we are two old fools; so they say, anyway. Let's live up to their opinion. I'll get a house for Cyrus and Gussie—and your girl can live with 'em, if she wants to!" The Captain's bitterness showed then.

"She could live here," murmured Mrs. North.

"What do you say?"

The little old lady laughed excitedly, and shook her head; the tears stood in her eyes.

"Do you want to leave Old Chester?" the Captain demanded.

"You know I don't," she said, sighing.

"She'd take you away to-morrow," he threatened, "if she knew I had—I had—"

"She sha'n't know it."

"Well, then, we've got to get spliced to-morrow."

"Oh, Alfred, no! I don't believe Dr. Lavendar would—"

"I'll have no dealings with Lavendar," the Captain said, with sudden stiffness; "he's like all the rest of 'em. I'll get a license in Upper Chester, and we'll go to some parson there."

Mrs. North's eyes snapped. "Oh, no, no!" she protested; but in another minute they were shaking hands on it.

"Cyrus and Gussie can go and live by themselves," said the Captain, joyously, "and I'll get that hold cleaned out; she's kept the ports shut ever since she married Cyrus."

"And I'll make a cake! And I'll take care of your clothes; you really are dreadfully shabby"; she turned him round to the light, and brushed off some ashes. The Captain beamed. "Poor Alfred! and there's a button gone! that daughter-in-law of yours

can't sew any more than a cat (and she *is* a cat!). But I love to mend. Mary has saved me all that. She's such a good daughter — poor Mary. But she's unmarried, poor child."

However, it was not to-morrow. It was two or three days later that Dr. Lavendar and Danny, jogging along behind Goliath under the buttonwoods on the road to Upper Chester, were somewhat inconvenienced by the dust of a buggy that crawled up and down the hills just a little ahead. The hood of this buggy was up, upon which fact —it being a May morning of rollicking wind and sunshine—Dr. Lavendar speculated to his companion: "Daniel, the man in that vehicle is either blind and deaf, or else he has something on his conscience; in either case he won't mind our dust, so we'll cut in ahead

at the watering-trough. G'on, Goliath!"

But Goliath had views of his own about the watering-trough, and instead of passing the hooded buggy, which had stopped there, he insisted upon drawing up beside it. "Now, look here," Dr. Lavendar remonstrated, "you know you're not thirsty." But Goliath plunged his nose down into the cool depths of the great iron caldron, into which, from a hollow log, ran a musical drip of water. Dr. Lavendar and Danny, awaiting his pleasure, could hear a murmur of voices from the depths of the eccentric vehicle which put up a hood on such a day; when suddenly Dr. Lavendar's eye fell on the hind legs of the other horse. "That's Cipher's trotter," he said to himself, and leaning out, cried: "Hi! Cy?" At which the other horse

was drawn in with a jerk, and Captain Price's agitated face peered out from under the hood.

"Where! Where's Cyrus?" Then he caught sight of Dr. Lavendar. "'*The devil and Tom Walker'!*" said the Captain, with a groan. The buggy backed erratically.

"Look out!" said Dr. Lavendar—but the wheels locked.

Of course there was nothing for Dr. Lavendar to do but get out and take Goliath by the head, grumbling, as he did so, that Cyrus "shouldn't own such a spirited beast."

"I am somewhat hurried," said Captain Price, stiffly.

The old minister looked at him over his spectacles; then he glanced at the small, embarrassed figure shrinking into the depths of the buggy.

("Hullo, hullo, hullo!" he said, soft-

ly. "Well, Gussie's done it.) You'd better back a little, Captain," he advised.

"I can manage," said the Captain.

"I didn't say 'go back,'" Dr. Lavendar said, mildly.

"Oh!" murmured a small voice from within the buggy.

"I expect you need me, don't you, Alfred?" said Dr. Lavendar.

"What?" said the Captain, frowning.

"Captain," said Dr. Lavendar, simply, "if I can be of any service to you and Mrs. North, I shall be glad."

Captain Price looked at him. "Now, look here, Lavendar, we're going to do it this time, if all the parsons in—well, in the church, try to stop us!"

"I'm not going to try to stop you."

"But Gussie said you said—"

"Alfred, at your time of life, are you beginning to quote Gussie?"

"But she said you said it would be—"

"Captain Price, I do not express my opinion of your conduct to your daughter-in-law. You ought to have sense enough to know that."

"Well, why did you talk to her about it?"

"I didn't talk to her about it. But," said Dr. Lavendar, thrusting out his lower lip, "I should like to."

"We were going to hunt up a parson in Upper Chester," said the Captain, sheepishly.

Dr. Lavendar looked about, up and down the silent, shady road, then through the bordering elder-berries into an orchard. "If you have your license," he said, "I have my prayer-book. Let's go into the orchard. There are two men working there we can get for witnesses — Danny isn't quite enough, I suppose."

THERE WAS A LITTLE SILENCE, AND THEN DR. LAVENDER BEGAN

The Captain turned to Mrs. North. "What do you say, ma'am?" he said. She nodded, and gathered up her skirts to get out of the buggy. The two old men led their horses to the side of the road and hitched them to the rail fence; then the Captain helped Mrs. North through the elder-bushes, and shouted out to the men ploughing at the other side of the orchard. They came—big, kindly young fellows, and stood gaping at the three old people standing under the apple-tree in the sunshine. Dr. Lavendar explained that they were to be witnesses, and the boys took off their hats.

There was a little silence, and then, in the white shadows and perfume of the orchard, with its sunshine, and drift of petals falling in the gay wind, Dr. Lavendar began. . . . When he came to "Let no man put asunder—"

Captain Price growled in his grizzled red beard, "Nor woman, either!" But only Mrs. North smiled.

When it was over, Captain Price drew a deep breath of relief. "Well, this time we made a sure thing of it, Mrs. North!"

"*Mrs. North?*" said Dr. Lavendar; and then he did chuckle.

"Oh—" said Captain Price, and roared at the joke.

"You'll have to call me Letty," said the pretty old lady, smiling and blushing.

"Oh," said the Captain; then he hesitated. "Well, now, if you don't mind, I—I guess I won't call you Letty. I'll call you Letitia."

"Call me anything you want to," said Mrs. Price, gayly.

Then they all shook hands with one another and with the witnesses, who

found something left in their palms that gave them great satisfaction, and went back to climb into their respective buggies.

"We have shore leave," the Captain explained; "we won't go back to Old Chester for a few days. You may tell 'em, Lavendar."

"Oh, may I?" said Dr. Lavendar, blankly. "Well, good-bye, and good luck!"

He watched the other buggy tug on ahead, and then he leaned down to catch Danny by the scruff of the neck.

"Well, Daniel," he said, "'*if at first you don't succeed*'—"

And Danny was pulled into the buggy.

THE END